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# A LITTLE BOOK *of* R·L·S.

“Go, little book, and wish to all  
Flowers in the garden, meat in the hall,  
A bin of wine, a spice of wit,  
A house with lawns enclosing it,  
A living river by the door,  
A nightingale in the sycamore!”

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# *Behind the Scenes with STEVENSON*

IN the romantic history of Stevenson's life nothing is more delightful than the story of how he came to write some of the books that have made him great.

Before he had become a famous author he was very fond of staying at a little town in France in the Forest of Fontainebleau, where there was a colony of artists. Here he met a Mrs. Osbourne, an American lady who was studying painting, and the two spent many delightful hours together. But, at last, the lady with her two children, a boy and a girl, returned to her home in California. After lingering in Paris some six months Stevenson made his famous excursion to Monastier, which he describes in "Travels with a Donkey," and returned to Scotland; but he did not forget the woman who was

"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,  
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew."

In fact, to his cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, who had been at Fontainebleau and knew her, he wrote about "Travels with a Donkey": "Lots of it is mere protestation to F. (Mrs. Osbourne). This to me is the main thread of interest." So it is not surprising that he determined to follow her to America.

Stevenson came of a fine old Scotch family in comfortable circumstances, but in spite of the fact that he was really too ill to try to make his own living by writing, he was too proud to ask his father for money, and he decided to go to America in the steerage and to cross the United States on an emigrant train. This trip, through its hardships, very nearly caused his death, but it gave to the world two fascinating books, for he describes, as only Stevenson can, his companions and experiences on shipboard and travelling to California in "The Amateur Emigrant" and "Across the Plains."

How he finally married Fanny Osbourne in California, and how her tender care kept him alive fourteen years, during which he wrote the books that were to make him immortal, is one of the most beautiful stories in the world of literature.

From the very first he became fast friends with his stepson, Lloyd. Mrs. Sanchez, in her recent biography of her sister, "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson," has told of the happy times together in those early days in California:

"For the long evenings of winter we had a game which Louis invented expressly for our amusement. Lloyd Osbourne, then a boy of twelve, had rather more than the usual boy's fondness for stories of the sea. It will be remembered that it was to please this boy that Mr. Stevenson afterward wrote 'Treasure Island.' Our game was to tell a continued story, each person being limited to two minutes, taking up the tale at the point where the one before him left off. We

older ones had a secret understanding that we were to keep Lloyd away from the sea, but strive as we might, even though we left the hero stranded in the middle of the Desert of Sahara, Lloyd never failed to have him sailing the bounding main again before his allotted two minutes expired."

## *Treasure Island*

After a time Stevenson was able to take his family back to Europe, and once when they were staying at Braemar, in the highlands of Scotland, Lloyd Osbourne came home from school for a holiday. Of this momentous visit Stevenson says:

"He had no thought of literature; it was the art of Raphael that received his fleeting suffrages, and with the aid of pen and ink and a shilling box of water-colours, he had soon turned one of the rooms into a picture-gallery. My more immediate duty toward the gallery was to be showman; but I would sometimes unbend a little, join the artist (so to speak) at the easel, and pass the afternoon with him in a generous emulation, making coloured drawings. On one of these occasions I made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance 'Treasure Island.' . . .

"No child but must remember laying his head in the

grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest, and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Somewhat in this way, as I pored upon my map of ‘Treasure Island,’ the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters, as they passed to and fro, fighting, and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. The next thing I knew I had some paper before me, and was writing out a list of chapters. How often have I done so, and the thing gone no farther! But there seemed elements of success about this enterprise. It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. Women were excluded. (That was Lloyd’s stipulation.)

“On a chill September morning, by the cheek of a brisk fire, and the rain drumming on the window, I began the ‘Sea Cook,’ for that was the original title. . . . Day by day, after lunch, I read aloud my morning’s work to the family.

“I had counted on one boy; I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once, with all the romance and childishness of his original nature. His own stories, that every night of his life he put himself to sleep with, dealt perpetually with ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the era of steam. He never finished one of these romances: the lucky man did not require to! But in ‘Treasure Island’ he recognized something kindred to his own imagination;

it was *his* kind of picturesque; and he not only heard with delight the daily chapter, but set himself actively to collaborate. When the time came for Billy Bones's chest to be ransacked, he must have passed the better part of a day preparing, on the back of a legal envelope, an inventory of its contents, which I exactly followed; and the name of 'Flint's old ship,' the *Walrus*, was given at his particular request."

And so during the winter "Treasure Island" was finished. The story was published in a little English magazine called *Young Folks*. Stevenson received for it the miserable price of £2 s.10 a page (forty-five hundred words to the page). It appeared under the name of Captain George North, for Stevenson did not wish to injure his reputation as a writer of serious essays. Nearly two years elapsed before this yarn of buccaneers and pirates became one of the most popular of boys' books, and an amusing and almost unbelievable fact is that the editors of *Young Folks* received more than one indignant letter from readers for printing such a tale.

## *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

After spending several winters at Davos Platz, in Switzerland, Stevenson's father gave him a house in the south of England, at Bournemouth. It was here that he wrote one of the most famous of all his stories, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." His cousin, Graham Bal-

four, details the circumstances of the writing of this tale, in his official "Life of Stevenson":

"A subject much in his thoughts at this time was the duality of man's nature, and the alternation of good and evil; and he was for a long while casting about for a story to embody this central idea. Out of this frame of mind had come the sombre imagination of 'Markheim,' but that was not what he required. The true story still delayed, till suddenly one night he had a dream. He awoke, and found himself in possession of two, or rather three, of the scenes in the 'Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.'

"Its waking existence, however, was by no means without incident. He dreamed these scenes in considerable detail, including the circumstance of the transforming powders, and so vivid was the impression that he wrote the story off at a red heat, just as it had presented itself to him in his sleep.

"'In the small hours of one morning,' says Mrs. Stevenson, 'I was awakened by cries of horror from Louis. Thinking he had a nightmare, I awakened him. He said angrily: "Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogey tale." I had awakened him at the first transformation scene.'

"Mr. Osbourne writes: 'I don't believe that there was ever such a literary feat before as the writing of "Dr. Jekyll." I remember the first reading as though it were yesterday. Louis came down-stairs in a fever; read nearly half the book aloud; and then, while we were still gasping,

he was away again, and busy writing. I doubt if the first draft took so long as three days.'

"He had lately had a hemorrhage, and was strictly forbidden all discussion or excitement. No doubt the reading aloud was contrary to the doctor's orders; at any rate Mrs. Stevenson, according to the custom then in force, wrote her detailed criticism of the story as it then stood, pointing out her chief objection—that it was really an allegory, whereas he had treated it purely as if it were a story. In the first draft Jekyll's nature was bad all through, and the Hyde change was worked only for the sake of a disguise. She gave the paper to her husband and left the room. After a while his bell rang; on her return she found him sitting up in bed (the clinical thermometer in his mouth), pointing with a long denunciatory finger to a pile of ashes. He had burned the entire draft. Having realized that he had taken the wrong point of view, that the tale was an allegory and not another 'Markheim,' he at once destroyed his manuscript, acting not out of pique, but from a fear that he might be tempted to make too much use of it, and not rewrite the whole from a new standpoint. It was written again in three days."

In his extraordinary essay, "A Chapter on Dreams," Stevenson has told of the strange stories he saw "acted out" in that small theatre of the brain which we keep brightly lighted all night long. Often the jets are down and the darkness and sleep reign undisturbed in the remainder of the body—and in his own words he tells how Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde came to him.

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